

# Rethinking Plagiarism in the Digital Age

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Plagiarism is a complex and evolving concept. Before reading this article, ask yourself: What is plagiarism? Why do students plagiarize? What can I do to prevent it?

Most public and private schools, colleges, and universities have academic integrity or honor codes and consequences for plagiarism, but few professors and teachers explicitly address what plagiarism means or provide examples of individual contexts and degrees of unauthorized copying. More important, students are seldom engaged in instruction or discussion about what plagiarism is, why it is a problem, and how it can be avoided (Power, 2009). When an incident does occur, consequences can vary greatly, ranging from swift and severe punishment to a slap on the wrist to nothing at all (Robinson-Zanartu, Pena, E., Cook-Morales, Pena, A., Afshani, & Nguyen, 2005). Punishment is often the same whether the incident was blatant, passive, or incidental (McCabe, 2005a; Vicinus & Eisner, 2008).

In this article, we will make the case that plagiarism is a complex issue in need of reexamination. A common misconception is that consensus exists on what actions constitute plagiarism and whether engaging

in plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty is a major breach of ethics. There seems to be little concern for differentiating degrees of seriousness, such that the intentional copying of large amounts of text without any acknowledgment is often viewed and treated the same as failing to properly cite sources. There also seems to be a lack of understanding that plagiarism is a socially constructed concept that is not universally recognized; for example, the Amish see no problem with copying text from other sources and often teach the practice in their schools (Fishman, 1981).

The current concept of plagiarism is based on a capitalist view of property and ownership. It assumes that everything of value can be owned, bought, and sold and that ideas, knowledge, and art are created by individuals who have the rights of ownership. This view is deeply ingrained in Western culture. The U.S. Constitution grants Congress the right “to promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” But the notion that ideas can be owned is tenuous at best. Is it really reasonable for Girl Scouts to be forced to pay royalties for singing songs around campfires or for the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers to collect a fee each time someone sings the “Happy Birthday” song



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more than a century after it was written (Lethem, 2008)?

Traditional definitions of plagiarism are further challenged by the digital revolution. The ways that knowledge is currently created and distributed require that plagiarism be given “close reconsideration as we develop technologies that broaden who may produce and circulate cultural materials (Jenkins, 2006, p. 189).” Easy access to massive amounts of information make policing for ownership of ideas nearly impossible. This situation has caused the current Millennial generation to see knowledge ownership, acquisition, and distribution in radically different terms than in previous generations. Clearly, academia is past due in reevaluating the concept and how we deal with it in secondary and higher education.

Our view of plagiarism is based on a social constructivist perspective and is incompatible with the concept of ownership of ideas and knowledge. The idea of *public commons* (Lethem, 2008) provides an alternative view of knowledge, ideas, and art. *Commons* are anything that can be seen as belonging simultaneously to everybody and to nobody. Physical examples include air, water, streets, parks, and so forth. The ultimate public common is language: used by all members of a linguistic community, governed by rules derived by common consent, changed by all users but not so much as to make it incomprehensible. In short, owned by everyone and no one at the same time.

We have come to believe that all ideas have a social history and that knowledge is constructed over time through language use by multiple thinkers who use language to build common understandings. Learning takes place as individuals become active, participatory members of “communities of practice” (e.g., Rogoff & Lave, 1999; Wenger, 1998). The influence of digital technologies, particularly the Internet and social networking media, such as Facebook and Twitter, has resulted in shifts in how these communities are conceived, in the power structure within the communities, and in the way knowledge is constructed, shared, and evaluated. We are undoubtedly moving toward a more “participatory culture,” which Jenkins (2009) defines as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby experienced participants pass along knowledge to novices (p. xi).” The

focus of literacy in these cultures is on community involvement and the sharing and co-construction of knowledge, rather than on individual expression.

In the world of schooling, plagiarism takes on moral and ethical dimensions. In what may be a generational issue, students’ plagiarism is usually viewed in the most negative sense. Professional discussions of plagiarism and the current cohort of middle, high school, and college students seem to be driven by feelings of distrust and self-righteousness. As has been the case at least since the ancient Greeks, there is a general perception that something is grievously wrong with the upcoming generation. Socrates was known to have wandered the streets of ancient Athens, bemoaning the youth as lazy and incapable of learning what was necessary to be citizens (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). Today’s Millennial generation is often criticized as undisciplined and underachieving academically (Considine, Horton, & Moorman, 2009). Often cited as one of their greatest transgressions is Internet plagiarism, the wholesale copying and pasting of text from online sources. Deliberations are often framed in terms of betrayal and fear (Williams, 2007), with plagiarism viewed in terms of a sort of academic crime or sin (Sutherland-Smith, 2005). Such attitudes lead to a “poisonous atmosphere between teachers and students that makes them adversaries instead of collaborators” (Williams, 2007, p. 352).

It should be pointed out that although current concerns focus on student plagiarism, examples of teacher and administrative plagiarism are commonplace. In 1980, it was discovered that the plagiarism section in the student assistant’s handbook of the University of Oregon was copied verbatim from the Stanford University handbook (New York Times, 1980). An article in *Syllabus* on Internet plagiarism was found to contain four sentences nearly identical to those in an article that had appeared in the *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration* (Carnevale, 2003). What is more disturbing and commonplace is the use by professors of their graduate students’ work without appropriate recognition and citation (Bartlett & Smallwood, 2004).

Clearly, plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are common among students in American secondary schools and higher education. In a survey of 2,294 high school juniors at 14 public and 11 private schools, McCabe (2005b) found that 34% submitted as their own work text that was copied nearly word for word from written sources and that 34% copied a few sentences without citation. For Internet-related plagiarism, 16% of the students reported turning in

a paper secured from the Internet, and 52% admitted to copying a few sentences without citing the source. McCabe noted that “many high school students believe—or say they believe—that if information is on the Internet, it is public knowledge and does not need to be footnoted—even if it’s quoted verbatim” (p. 239).

The results of research on plagiarism and academic integrity are equivocal. In contrast to the McCabe study (2005b), Scanlon and Neumann’s (2002) survey of 698 students in nine colleges found that only 8% reported frequently copying text without citation, 3% copying a paper without citation, and 2% purchasing a paper online. Interestingly, respondents believed of *others* that 50% frequently copied text without citation, 28% copied a paper without citation, and 21% purchased a paper online. Apparently, many perceive that others plagiarize more frequently than evidence would support.

For most college and university faculty, the requisite academic integrity statement is something they add to the syllabus yet never discuss unless an incident arises. They assume that students clearly understand these policies, they expect students not to engage in acts of academic dishonesty, and they believe that harsh penalties should be invoked when violations occur. As a result, proactive practices that would inform students about issues of academic integrity are seldom implemented (Hulsart & McCarthy, 2008; McCabe, 2005b; McCabe & Pavela, 2004; Williams, 2007).

When it comes to cheating and plagiarism, the practice of blame is cyclical; faculty, students, and administrators all point the finger at one another, and no viable solutions are decided on (McCabe, 2005b). The real issue is not how frequently students plagiarize, the degree to which they plagiarize, or even the medium with which they plagiarize, but *why* they plagiarize in the first place. Given that the punishment for plagiarism can be extraordinarily harsh, why do students risk it?

## Plagiarism, Millennials, and the Internet

The current prevalence of cheating and plagiarism is well documented (Adler-Kassner, Anson, & Howard, 2008; Grossberg, 2008; McCabe, Trevino, & Butterfield, 2001). However, it is not unique to today’s cohort of students. Incidents of students engaging in blatant or inadvertent copying of another’s words has remained constant for the past two hundred years (Carter, 2008), although the medium with which students plagiarize

and the sociocultural expectations for academic integrity have changed (Ma, Wan, & Lu, 2008; Senders, 2008; Suarez & Martin, 2001; Sulikowski, 2008). Although plagiarism is clearly an academic issue, the proliferation of digital media with which students interact daily and the growth of the Internet as a source of information have made it a literacy issue as well.

Plagiarism has always concerned teachers and administrators, who want students’ work to represent their own efforts and to reflect the outcomes of their learning. With the advent of the Internet and easy access to almost limitless written material on every conceivable topic, suspicion of student plagiarism has begun to affect teachers at all levels, at times diverting them from the work of developing students’ writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities (Council of Writing Program Administrators, 2003).

Although no empirical research has established a direct link between plagiarism and the Internet (Carter, 2008), several studies name easy access to online material as a catalyst for plagiarism (Emerson, 2008; Ma et al., 2008; Ma, Lu, Turner, & Wan, 2007; Power, 2009; Senders, 2008; Suarez & Martin, 2001; Sulikowski, 2008). Technology has become a primary cultural tool for communication, and though it offers greater access to a variety of ideas and information, it has also created the potential for students to misrepresent these ideas and information as their own (Howard & Davies, 2009; Robinson-Zanartu et al., 2005; Williams, 2007). Because there are so many ways to access information and often multiple authors of that information, lines of ownership are blurred (Moorman & Horton, 2007). Students often have experience using search engines, social media, and multimedia tools such as digital and video cameras outside of academic environments. However, these digital literacy experiences are unlikely to include the skills, knowledge, and expertise necessary to locate, navigate, and evaluate information in an ethical manner (Howard & Davies, 2009; Pfannenstiel, 2010). It is time for teachers at the middle, high school, and college levels to assume responsibility to *teach* these skills.

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Today's students are part of the Millennial generation, individuals born more or less between 1982 and 2002 (Howe & Strauss, 2000) who have always had constant access to technology. Millennials have grown up using computers and the Internet as their primary tools for communication, entertainment, productivity, and publication (Considine et al., 2009; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Moorman & Horton, 2007). Millennials view plagiarism differently than faculty do because they do not have the same perceptions of the value of intellectual property (Senders, 2008). They don't see taking words or ideas from the Internet or in digital form as heinous as copying something directly from a book; a distant, less tangible author makes it easier for them to justify taking the words or ideas of others (Robinson-Zanartu et al., 2005). In addition, much of the content on the Internet is free. In their lives outside of school it is second nature for Millennials to download, cut, copy, and paste. Their concept of ownership is different from the one their teachers and professors grew up with and have come to take for granted (Moorman & Horton, 2007; Robinson-Zanartu et al., 2005; Williams, 2007). Intellectual property, a complex idea to begin with, is clearly in need of additional analysis and definition by both students and faculty.

Adding to the complexities of plagiarism are the academic standards and expectations imposed on Millennials. Twenty-first-century learning emphasizes creativity, innovation, and collaboration; assignments that embody these traits often make it difficult to credit the original source (Senders, 2008; Vicinus & Eisner, 2008). Students are increasingly encouraged to use wikis, blogs, and other social platforms that promote collaboration by providing the means for multiple authors to write, edit, and revise documents (Dobson & Willinsky, 2009; Pennycook, 1996). Web 2.0 tools designed to foster digital literacy and socially constructive online learning experiences have altered conventions and cultural norms for writing (Dobson & Willinsky, 2009; National Writing Project with DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010; Sweeny, 2010); therefore, instruction must change as well (Ma et al., 2008).

Turnitin.com and other plagiarism-detection software search for matched content to determine whether a paper has been plagiarized or purchased, but they cannot address the underlying reasons. Asking students who strive to abide by honor and academic integrity codes to submit a paper to an online detection service is a presumption of guilt (Carter, 2008; Emerson, 2008; Williams, 2007). In any case, using

online detection software is like putting a Band-Aid on a bruise. What is needed is a more proactive way to situate information and digital literacy instruction in authentic contexts and use plagiarism as a teaching tool. Rather than being reactive when plagiarism occurs, we need to acknowledge the complexities of using the Internet and recognize the importance of students' acquisition of these new literacies and skills as paramount to their success in academic settings and beyond (Howard & Davies, 2009; McCabe, 2005a; Pfannenstiel, 2010; Sulikowski, 2008; Williams, 2007).

## Reasons Students Plagiarize

The easy answer to why students plagiarize is that they are lazy and don't want to do their own work. However, close analysis of the research on plagiarism reveals a much more complex milieu. Several reasons contribute to acts of plagiarism, including students' underdeveloped sense of integrity, lack of maturity, online ethical practices, lack of experience with a particular genre of writing, lack of interest in the assignment, observation of peers' behavior and attitudes toward plagiarism, and the pressure to earn or maintain high grades (Ma et al., 2007; McCabe, 2005b; McCabe et al., 2001; Strom & Strom, 2007). When Millennials are given vague or busywork assignments, their lack of interest may prompt them to plagiarize just to get the task done, or their lack of understanding of how to do the assignment may cause them to turn to plagiarism to maintain their grade point average. Thus, they do not blame their peers for cheating because they view it as an act of self-preservation more than an act of dishonesty (Hulsart & McCarthy, 2008; Ma et al., 2007).

Assignments that have little relevance and interest for students may force them to "steal" things, usually words, that they frequently don't want or care about, or even hold onto for long" (Senders, 2008, pp. 196–197) just for the sake of completing an assignment. Power (2009) reported that students did not view stealing words for a school assignment to be egregious since they were not trying to pass the work off as their own in another venue or publication. Students are often asked to write in a vacuum, writing what they think the teacher or professor wants to hear, their task made more difficult and stressful by the fact that their sole reader knows more about the topic than they do. Student writing assignments are generally inauthentic in purpose and audience; student writers know it is unlikely that anyone other than the teacher

will ever read their work. In contrast, scholars and other “real” writers are always writing for meaningful purposes with less knowledgeable, identifiable, and interested audiences.

In particular, university faculty understand the importance and rationale of sources and references. Tenure and promotion policies have made them keenly aware of issues of credit and credibility, and, more important, faculty are *rewarded* for writing. They recognize that the purpose of citations is to give credit not for words or language but for ideas (Senders, 2008). When we ask students to research what the experts in a given field have written about a particular topic in an original way, we perpetuate the notion that knowledge and ideas can be individually owned, thus increasing the pressure on students to come up with writing that is as equally insightful and rigorous as the writings of the noted scholars they research (Williams, 2007). No wonder they plagiarize! Those students who do avoid plagiarism do so mostly out of fear, not out of respect for the field (Power, 2009). So, is it worse for a student to plagiarize noted researchers or to conduct less-rigorous research? Can we give them credit for finding the best resources? Do we, as academics, always produce original work? If our learning occurs through learning from others, as social constructivist theory posits (Vygotsky, 1978), then is it not true that all of our writing is rooted in the work of others (Power, 2009)? Answering these questions requires a paradigm shift; we need to rethink literacy instruction in juxtaposition with the way today’s students learn, think, and work.

Outside of school, most Millennials are prolific readers and writers (Considine et al., 2009). Texting, blogs, e-mail and other digital forms of literacy are pervasive. In their everyday lives, they adhere to different standards of ownership of words, art, and ideas. Much of their creativity comes in the form of creating collages of others’ online work. The most obvious example is iPod playlists. Today’s educators have the opportunity to take advantage of the Millennials’ literacy skills and creativity to introduce them to the world of systematic

academic thought. In the next section, we will explore how such instruction might take place.

## Proactive Steps to Prevent Plagiarism

Twenty-first-century educators need to develop ways to discourage plagiarism by engaging students in the inquiry process through modification of assignments and research practices (Lehman, 2010; Ma et al., 2007; Strom, P. & Strom, D., 2007). We need to realize that times have changed, students have changed, and ways of reading, writing, communicating, and accessing information have changed. Frank Smith (1987) wrote of the importance of admitting students as members of the literacy club; it is time to allow students into the “academic club,” exposing them to the secrets of writing in academia, explaining why we write and what the rewards are, and encouraging them to want to write about their major interests.

### Create a Culture of Academic Integrity

Academic-integrity policies and honor codes can be catalysts in preventing plagiarism (McCabe et al., 2001). Rather than policies and codes that are established and enforced by teachers and administrators, honor codes should offer opportunities for students to police themselves. Increased faculty support for promoting academic integrity through more meaningful assignments and experiences would also help create a culture of academic integrity. Unlike the blanket statement in a syllabus, enlightened honor codes are making a difference in several institutions where rigid yet seldom-enforced academic-integrity codes once ruled (McCabe & Pavela, 2004). However, the most effective way of dealing with plagiarism is not through rules or codes but by actively addressing issues through instruction.

Engaging students in inquiry-based learning can help them develop ownership of their learning. Stephens and Ballast (2011) suggest a “digital make over” for traditional lessons to create more student-centered assignments that focus on higher-order thinking skills. Doing so allows instructors to use technology to enhance or diversify instruction, making learning more relevant and purposeful and greatly reducing the need or desire to plagiarize (Lehman, 2010; Strom, P. & Strom, D., 2007). Rather than requiring students to submit traditional essays and research papers solely for the instructor to read, they should be offered multimedia ways of presenting and

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sharing information with a wider audience (National Writing Project with DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, & Hicks, 2010; Sweeny, 2010). These can include Web 2.0 options such as creating videos, glogs, wikis, websites, and blogs. For example, instead of writing book reports or literary critiques, both of which could be easily obtained in whole or in part from book-review sites such as Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) or Goodreads ([www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)), students could use multimedia tools such as Animoto ([animoto.com](http://animoto.com)), Voicethread ([voicethread.com](http://voicethread.com)), or PC and Mac photo and video software to create synthesis projects for the books they read. This would also allow the instructor to emphasize that plagiarism doesn't apply just to the unauthorized use of written words but to images, videos, and music as well. Instructors could also model appropriate use of media by demonstrating how to use a search engine such as Creative Commons ([search.creativecommons.org](http://search.creativecommons.org)) or Behold ([behold.cc](http://behold.cc)) or by using Google Images Advanced Search options to find images designated for public use through a Creative Commons license (Byrne, 2011).

Faculty should also establish clear expectations for assignments and work collaboratively with students to ensure that shared goals are met (Hulsart & McCarthy, 2008). One way this can be accomplished is through periodic reviews of written work. These reviews can be in a traditional hard-copy format or in digital form submitted through a learning-management system or file-sharing site such as a wiki ([www.wikispaces.com](http://www.wikispaces.com)), Google docs ([docs.google.com](http://docs.google.com)), or Dropbox ([www.dropbox.com](http://www.dropbox.com)). Creating checkpoints along the way, where students are responsible for submitting works in progress, can deter plagiarism or, at the least, spot it in its earliest stage, while there is still time to intervene and create a teachable moment (Lehman, 2010; Williams, 2007).

### Making Instruction Explicit: An Example

We have begun to address plagiarism explicitly in our undergraduate teacher-education courses. Instructional conversations (Goldenberg, 1992/1993), which balance the authority and structure of instruction with the equality and openness of conversation, form the cornerstone of our teaching. Students are engaged in discussions about copyright laws, citation standards, academic integrity, and the huge gray area between building on the ideas of others and stealing them. T. S. Elliot's quote that "immature poets imitate; mature poets steal" usually initiates a great discussion; examples of literary and artistic theft can be provided.

Lethem (2008) cites the following: that the title of Hemmingway's novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* is taken from a John Donne poem; that the *Simpsons* relies on the *Flintstones* and the *Honeymooners*; that *West Side Story* mirrors *Romeo and Juliet*, which is clearly taken from Ovid's *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Students should be urged to find examples of writers and artists whose works clearly emerge from those of others.

One specific activity we use is a modified two-column notes strategy, as shown in Figure 1 (e.g., Jones, 2008). This activity helps our future teachers with both writing instruction and the issue of Internet plagiarism. Students are asked to develop a thesis statement and a number of main-idea sentences. Each main-idea sentence is placed in the left column of the two-column form. Students then search the Internet for supporting materials for their statements, copying and pasting text, with an appropriate citation, into the right-hand column. Figure 2 is an example of one student's effort. Students then use their final two-column notes product to produce an essay, writing original paragraphs based on their thesis statements and appropriate citations for their Internet sources. To view a more detailed explanation of how students are guided through the writing process, the student essay, other instructional suggestions, and a discussion board on plagiarism, please visit [engage.reading.org/Home](http://engage.reading.org/Home).

We have found in-class discussions about this assignment to be rich and to provide the platform for many teachable moments. Note that in the example, the student fails to follow the instruction to use APA style. This error was common and led to the insight that students are only vaguely familiar with APA, MLA, or other styles. In fact, it was common for students to recognize the initialism "APA" but not know what the letters stand for. This resulted in a minilesson on style formats and the origins of academic traditions in citations. The point was made that the reason for citing sources was not really about avoiding plagiarism but rather about anchoring writers' ideas in the theory and research that already exists.

Instruction followed on how to select and validate sources, how text from the Internet can be paraphrased, and, most important, how selected text can be elaborated based on the student's knowledge and additional research. Opportunities almost always arise to provide instruction on paragraph structure and transitions between paragraphs. In addition, the use of variations of two-column notes is possible, such as adding a third column or using the space below the copied text for paraphrasing.

**FIGURE 1 Two-Column Notes Strategy**

**Two Column Notes Assignment**

First, write a clear thesis statement:

*Current instability in the Middle East, especially OPEC countries, affects the world economy.*

In this column, write three opinion or perspective statements	In this column, copy and paste support for your statements from an Internet site. Make sure you include a citation in 6 <sup>th</sup> edition APA style.
1. Unrest in the ME causes the price of oil to rise significantly.	<p>“The spiraling turmoil in Libya, an OPEC country that is a significant oil supplier to Europe, was raising international alarm. Oil prices jumped \$1.67 to nearly \$88 a barrel Monday amid investor concern.”</p> <p><a href="http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110221/ap_on_re_af/af_libya_protests">http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110221/ap_on_re_af/af_libya_protests</a></p>
2. Foreign involvement forces national expenses to increase.	<p>According to the CBO, defense spending grew 9% annually on average from fiscal year 2000-2009.</p> <p><a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_federal_budget#cite_note-41">http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_federal_budget#cite_note-41</a></p>
3. Unrest affects jobs of foreign countries involved	<p>Two leading oil companies, Statoil and BP, said they were pulling some employees out of Libya or preparing to do so.</p> <p>EU foreign ministers were discussing on Monday the possible evacuation of European citizens.</p> <p><a href="http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110221/ap_on_re_af/af_libya_protests">http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110221/ap_on_re_af/af_libya_protests</a></p>

appropriate. Millennials are more focused, informed, and globally oriented than previous generations (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Since one of the most frequently cited reasons for plagiarism is a lack of interest or a failure to see relevance in assignments, one of the most powerful antidotes is to make instruction more relevant, more interesting, and more social. Educators can accomplish this goal by providing more options to demonstrate learning, including using Web 2.0 applications that foster collaboration and connect to students' experiences outside of school. In today's workplace, employees are seldom asked to write a formal paper or lengthy report. More often, they are expected to collaborate and promote products or services through dynamic multimedia presentations. Though educational contexts remain in which traditional essays and papers are appropriate, such as a thesis or a dissertation, educators should provide learner-centered alternatives that translate readily to the demands of a global society.

We have much to gain in bringing plagiarism to the forefront of literacy discussions. It is time for a

## Some Concluding Thoughts

To successfully deal with plagiarism, we must do more than preach about the virtues of academic integrity and damn the sin of stealing the ideas of others. We need to focus on developing communities of practice that value creative and reflective writing. Students need to be engaged in instruction that clarifies the origins and importance of honesty in intellectual pursuits. The current emphasis on testing and grades has made educators and students alike lose track of the more important goals of schooling, such as lifelong learning and national and global citizenship. Refocusing on higher-order goals can persuade students that plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are not in their long-term best interests.

Given the characteristics exhibited by Millennials, this refocusing seems to be particularly

renewed examination of the concept and how it affects schooling. We believe the discussion should start among educators. We need to have common professional agreement about what constitutes plagiarism. Plagiarism should be viewed on a continuum, ranging from blatant and unacceptable to incidental and trivial. It is important that the profession clarifies what constitutes unacceptable actions and what sanctions are appropriate. In doing so, the use of the works and ideas of others can be explored in a spirit of inquiry rather than shrouded in mystery within a culture of fear.

The conversation needs to continue in the classroom. We are convinced that students at the secondary and college level are, for the most part, in the dark about plagiarism. This discussion can be rich and exciting. If it is true that all ideas have a social history, as Vygotsky (1978) and the sociocultural

FIGURE 2 Two-Column Notes Assignment

Undergraduate Student Essay

Reading in the Content Areas  
Dr. Moorman  
February 21, 2011

Instability in the Middle East and its Global Effect

Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa have sparked emotions of all kinds throughout the world. For decades the area has been a major topic of conversation worldwide. Nearly all the world is tied to the Middle East and it may come as no surprise that current instability in the region, namely OPEC countries, will have an impact on the global economy.

When debating the Middle East the first matter of discussion is often the price of oil. How will today's event affect tomorrow's oil price. It's no secret the Middle East is a major producer in the world's oil and that our global economy depends on oil to survive. Oil is used by everything from making plastic packaging to shipping goods across the globe. Recently in Libya, one of several countries that make up the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), protests against the government have broken out. The response to the protests has been violent with mobs of government supporters taking to the streets shooting protesters. In fear of the chaotic situation, OPEC has increased the price of a barrel of oil to nearly \$88, a \$1.67 increase overnight (Michael, 2009). In a country that imports millions of barrels a year this new price suggest an impending doom for our already struggling economy. The price of gas will go up making shipping costs more expensive. An increase in shipping rates will force producers to raise prices to maintain current profit margins which will pass the cost along to the consumers. Consumers therefore will not only be impacted by oil prices at the gas pump but also in supermarkets or anywhere that uses an oil powered vehicle to transport its goods.

Another way in which recent civil unrest will affect the global economy is involvement from foreign nations. As stated previously, there are many countries worldwide with interests in the Middle East. A civil war in Libya or Egypt that causes oil prices to go up will also spark a debate about foreign policy in these nations affected by oil prices. People will want either of two things: foreign governments or military to intervene or not to intervene. Foreign intervention whether it be diplomatic or military is going to create an unforeseen budget expense, starting from the first analyst to detect whether or not action should be taken going up the ladder until action is taken. This action could last anywhere from a few days to several years. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) between the years 2000 and 2009 the U.S. defense spending has risen 9% each year. In an era of budget cuts and consciously trying to avoid expenses it is interesting to note the defense budget grows 9% exponentially each year (Edwards, Hoople, Shakin, & Woodland, 2009). In common terms, if I were to spend 9% more each year for nine years starting with \$100 at the end of the ninth year I will have spent \$217.19 that year. Now think about a national defense budget that increases at the same rate but by the billions of dollars.

Lastly, many countries worldwide have citizens with jobs in the Middle East and North Africa. There are job opportunities for all people ranging from contractors to business executives. When a country with citizens from other countries breaks out into riots the countries with citizens there are immediately concerned. First thoughts of one of these countries are the safety and wellbeing for its citizens. Will they be taken hostage or beaten in the streets? Do we need to evacuate them? Will military action be necessary? In Libya these questions are already major concerns for countries as well as companies. BP is already getting its employees out of the country and other companies are not far behind. Similarly, diplomats of the European Union are debating whether or not the evacuation of European citizens would be necessary and if things will make a turn for the worse (Michael, 2011). Extracting citizens from a foreign country is another costly unexpected expense for a government to undertake. It also takes people away from their jobs and payment. Many of these companies may compensate their employees but just as many may not.

It is apparent that unrest in the Middle East and North Africa has a large impact on the global economy through oil prices and foreign diplomacy. Since the resignation of Mubarak in Egypt it is becoming clear that many of the oppressed citizens in the Middle East are getting fed up with the way they are living and are also realizing that through protest they can make a difference. Egyptian and Libyan protests have been nonviolent although it is becoming apparent that the Libyan regime will not fall as easily as the Egyptian. There is also concern that other countries may have similar battles in the coming months. It will be interesting to see what happens in these countries. The effect this turmoil has on the U.S., Europe and the globe is becoming more and more apparent every day and if things were to turn more violent there will be concern with what will happen to our global economy.

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theorists suggest, then virtually every idea presented in any academic writing could be cited. How do we teach our students when citations are appropriate and what role they play in developing academic ideas?

We have provided one specific example of explicit instruction that engages students in copying information from the Internet, rewriting or paraphrasing, and then citing appropriately. Such instruction should aim at



demystifying the concept of plagiarism while improving students' research and writing skills. Too often, writing instruction is nothing more than the assignment of a task with the warning, implicit or explicit, that the work must be original and that copying the words or borrowing ideas without citation is a violation of academic integrity. Knowing students will use technology for writing and research, explicit instruction should model digital tools, with the expectation that students will use them to engage in writing that produces coherent, thoughtful, and interesting discourse. As writers, we value the power of academic writing as a learning experience and believe that discussions about plagiarism can provide a platform for helping students understand this power. With diligence and the acceptance of our role as *teachers* of writing, the concept of plagiarism can become a tool that makes our students better, more responsible writers.

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## Take Action

### STEPS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

You can take steps to address the complex issue of plagiarism both on the professional and the instructional level.

#### As a member of a teaching community, you can

- ✓ Engage your colleagues in discussions about plagiarism.
- ✓ Try to reach a consensus about what constitutes plagiarism.
- ✓ Make distinctions between blatant and trivial plagiarism.
- ✓ Determine appropriate responses and consequences to acts of plagiarism.

#### As a teacher, you can

- ✓ Make plagiarism an explicit topic in your instruction.
- ✓ Help students see how ideas evolve, and why it is important to acknowledge the work of others.
- ✓ Explain and model how to paraphrase and cite.
- ✓ Provide opportunities to write for realistic purposes and broad audiences.
- ✓ Review drafts of students' writing before the final text is due; try to identify acts of plagiarism early.
- ✓ Explicitly teach students how to search the Internet to find valid, reliable information.

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## More to Explore

### CONNECTED CONTENT-BASED RESOURCES

#### READWRITETHINK.ORG LESSON PLAN

- “Exploring Plagiarism, Copyright, and Paraphrasing” by Maria Kardick: [www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-plagiarism-copyright-paraphrasing-1062.html](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/exploring-plagiarism-copyright-paraphrasing-1062.html)

#### ONLINE RESOURCES

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